

The Livingstone Weekly

13 October 2013

Dear All

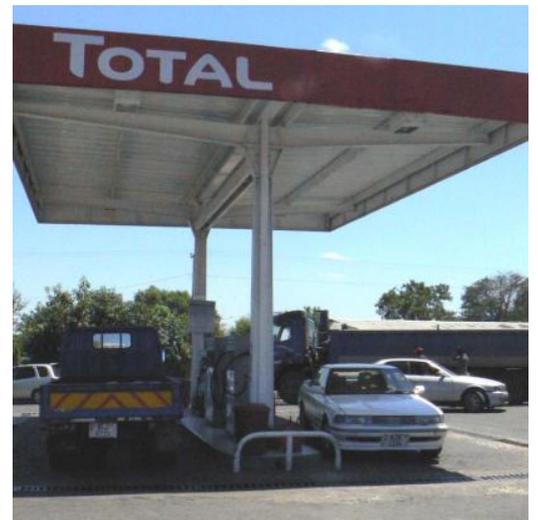
I am working on my laptop because my main computer is sick and gone for some major TLC at Falcon Technologies. My photographs are on that computer ... so my continued story in Kafue National Park will have to wait until next week.

I travelled to Lusaka during the week. I am working with Heather Chalcraft of the Lowdown – we are preparing a new travel magazine for Zambia – The Lowdown on Travel. We are on schedule to get the first one out for December ... let's hope it comes together ...

Anyhow, this time I drove instead of flying. It took me 7 hours there and 7 hours back because of road works on the Kafue road. Lots of detours. Interestingly the detours had been covered in molasses from Mazabuka Sugar. It was nice to drive along with the aroma of molasses wafting through the car window.

Is this the way we are?

When I stopped at Mazabuka at the Petrol Station (I have stopped at it for years), the attendants were really keen to wash my windscreen. This had never happened before. And then I realised what they were up to – they were standing between me and the petrol pump so that I couldn't check that it had started at zero. Sure enough, when I did see it, the reading was already over 20 litres and I knew that there had not been time for it to reach that figure. I immediately complained and got out of my car to shout louder. When the final figure of 49 litres popped up I told them that I may be old but I am not stupid. They quickly told me that there was a mistake and took off 15 litres and I paid my bill. I do not believe that it was a mistake – it was well-rehearsed.



The following day I went into Lands Department to buy some maps. The lady was very helpful and I bought 5 maps for K500. Very expensive, I thought, but I need maps. I paid my money and waited for a receipt. The lady went on to serve two other customers while I stood there. She finally realised that I was not going to leave without a receipt and went to the back of the room to write one. She did, but it had no copy. I wondered then if the money was going to go into the Lands Department coffers ... Surely they should be a bit more accountable ...

Later in the day I went into Game Stores to buy a new hosepipe. I was short-changed and when I was standing by the till checking my change, the lady at the till quickly produced another K10 to add to my change to make it right ... I wondered if I had just put the change in my bag without checking whether I would have got that K10. I know that K10 is not much, but if she does that several times a day, she will make quite a tidy sum.

Maybe I was just unlucky to experience these things, but all I know is that I am not used to it here in Livingstone.

I have emailed Total Zambia and Lands Department informing them of my concerns. I should have reported the lady at the checkout at Game but I was tired – there is no point complaining now. I think we have to have more of a culture of complaining so that this sort of thing does not continue. The government is keen to stop corruption; it therefore requires them to promote complaint.

Some photographs of our new park inhabitants sent by Peter River Club



ZAMBIA

Cowbells Down the Zambezi

David Lemon

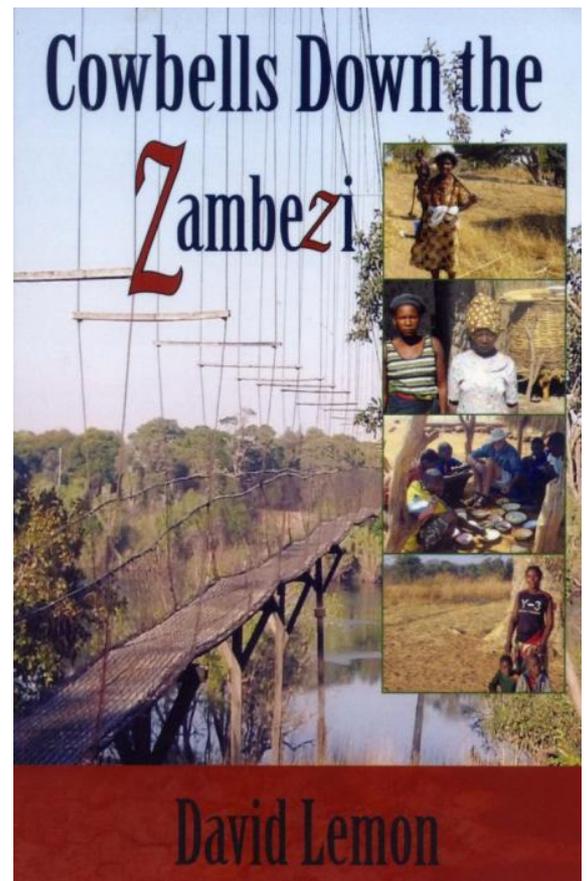
Many of you may remember David Lemon's trek along the Zambezi River from its source to Siavonga last year. David decided to have a break at this point – it was still hundreds of kilometres to go to the sea. He needed a rest, to build up his energy and to get some new teeth – his teeth had become so loose with the malnutrition. He returned to UK. After that we would all think that David would just relax, but, no. He wrote a book about the first part of his journey. The book, Cowbells Down the Zambezi, will be available in the shops in about a month.

David tells of the trials, dangers and fun times he had walking day after day as near as he could be to the Zambezi River. He meets many interesting people and on one occasion meets up with a herd of elephant at night:

I suppose it was inevitable that one of the elephant should decide to investigate my tree. I remained where I was, but slowly levered myself into a sitting position with my back against the trunk and smiled to myself as the huge shadow approached. In the moonlight, I could see that he was a young bull with small but thick tusks. Suddenly realising that there was something under the tree, he stopped ten metres away and I sat perfectly still, waiting to see what his reaction would be. For long minutes – or so it seemed – that massive animal peered into the shadows, while I gazed back at him. His trunk came up to test the wind, then he cocked his head first to one side and then the other. There was nothing I could do but pray he didn't get a sudden fright and run over me in his panic, because he looked awfully large from where I sat. At one stage that bull literally crouched down, almost falling to his knees in his efforts to see through the darkness and then suddenly, he realised what I was. There was a definite transition from puzzled pachyderm to responsible elephant. Raising himself to his full height, he took one last look at my shadowy shape, then moved purposefully into the darkness.

...

It's a must-read book so look out for it in the shops.



From Robin Pope Safaris

We have been a tad on the busy side but before we go on to that, guess what happened last night....? That familiar low grumble of thunder and then a 15 minute rain shower! What a joy. I mean just so lovely to get some rain but I have to say this morning you would never have guessed it, and then just to add insult to injury it is already a little on the toasty side! Let's hope that this is not a precursor to forthcoming attractions because we still have 6 weeks of the season to go at Nsefu and wading around in black cotton soil is no fun for anyone except for the hippos.



Other than the dappling we received last night things have been all go in the park. The Nkwali guests have been woken up on several mornings this last week by the familiar low bellow of lions roaming on the ever-increasing beach in front of camp as they stamp their mark. The leopards do not want to be shoved aside either, so have been up to their usual tricks dragging kills up trees and generally posing for the camera.



Despite two cold days, we have been slightly warm out here in the Luangwa and all the animals have been doing whatever they can to cool down including this rather sweaty hippo taking in some shade just outside Tena Tena. Interesting fact for you all out there – it is called blood sweat and is a pink secretion that oozes from their pores and in fact acts like a kind of sunscreen! By the way I hope that you are all impressed with my knowledge! Mind you, having been out here for so long it would be embarrassing if I didn't have a few facts tucked up my sleeve...

Memories of Kafue

My Kafue National Park story sparked a comment from one of the readers of the Livingstone Weekly:

When I was about 11 or 12 years old Mum & Dad took us (I have 2 brothers) to the Kafue Park. We were the third car to enter that very, very new game park. I still have a very clear memory of Lufupa camp, at the confluence of the Kafue and Lufupa Rivers. At that camp the "toilet was a "long drop". The "seat" was a brick construction – to me it was about the size of a large sofa! I could not bend my knees while sitting on it. The enclosure for this toilet was a U-shaped wall of grass, in the way the people built their grass huts, but the toilet did not have a roof nor a door. This convenience was wonderfully positioned as, while sitting there, one had a scenic view down the confluence of the two rivers! The "bath room (house?)" was similarly constructed of thatch and roofless. But what a marvel of architecture. There was no door here either, instead the wall of grass was constructed in a spiral so that on entering one walked around into the centre where there was a large zinc bath. The camp attendants kept oil drum of water heating over an open fire and when one wished to bath the water was carried in buckets to fill the bath. A bucket of hot and one of cold was left for the bather to adjust the temperature of his/her bath. To indicate that the loo or bathroom were occupied there was a rough piece of card tied to each structure (at the entrance to the bathroom spiral and at the outside back of the loo). On one side of each card was scrawled "Vacant" and on the other "Occupied". One flipped the card on going in and had to remember to turn it back to "Vacant" on leaving!

Wilderness Safaris

Siesta time!

It takes a cat to show us how to relax, doesn't it?

Photographed on the Busanga Plains by Ondyne Dobeyn — with Ingrid Baas Janssen.



ZAWA told not to place more value on animals than humans

Lusaka Times

The District Administration and the Traditional leadership in Luangwa District have cautioned the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) Officers in the area not to value animals than human beings.

Luangwa District Commissioner, Eunie Mumba and Chief Mphuka of the Chikunda people warned ZAWA officers not to value animals than human life but to be seen protecting people from animals. Mr. Mumba said they have observed with concern at the attitude of ZAWA officers who do not want to protect human life from animals. He said a lot of human life has been lost through animals especially elephants and ZAWA officers seem not to take any action to protect people from these animals. ...

He said a month rarely passes without his office receiving reports of elephants killing someone or destroying people's fields. The District Commissioner said the PF Government was a government of the people and it will not allow a situation where people are killed by wild animals. He said ZAWA officers should find a way of protecting the people from these animals especially elephants which have increased in number in the area.

And Chief Mphuka said it was sad that ZAWA offices only act quickly when they hear that a person has killed an animal but when an animal kills a person they take time to act. He said that it was sad that animals were more valued than human beings and called on them to change their work culture as this will bring them problems with the people.

Chief Mphuka said there was a lot of human/animal conflict in his chieftdom and ZAWA officers seem not to care about human life but only quick to arrest someone who has killed a wild animal. The ZAWA officers said they were doing everything to control the animals but inadequate staff and ammunition was there biggest problem.

Gill Comment: This attitude is common at the moment in Zambia and I do not think it is fair to state that ZAWA cares more about animals than people. ZAWA officers are tasked with the job of protecting wildlife. They protect wildlife so that our people can get jobs. Throughout this issue of the Weekly there is a lot about elephants – the damage they can do, the poaching of them and whether there is a future for them. Do we want to see a world without them? It is stated that if we do nothing about the continued poaching there could be none left in 10-15 years.

People who live near to wildlife areas have problems living with elephant but we have to look at ways of protecting the people – not asking for the demise of our natural heritage and one of our best ways of providing employment.

ZIMBABWE

Cyanide in Hwange

Over 100 elephants were killed from a poisoned waterhole in Hwange National Park in September. The waterhole had cyanide in it. That 100 elephants died we know, but we do not know the number of other animals which also died from drinking at the waterhole. We do not know how many predators died after eating from the carcasses. We do not know how many vultures died too. The fallout from this terrible act will probably never be known.

The poachers have been arrested from nearby villages. But how did they get their hands on cyanide? Cyanide is used in mining and its sale is restricted to licensed mining companies. After a search of the nearby villages 240 kg of cyanide was found in their houses. How much more is still in the hands of the villagers and is still waiting to be used in waterholes in Hwange? These are questions authorities are asking themselves.

Although we can lock up the actual poachers and put them away for many years, the 'big fish' who supplied and gave the idea to these villagers are still out there. And we need to know who they are. Suspicion is falling on senior army, police and CIO officers who have been given mining rights in the area under the indigenisation programme.

Zimbabwe has been reduced to such a dire state with so much poverty in the rural areas that there will be many desperately hungry people who will be willing to use cyanide again in Hwange's waterholes. They may only be given US\$100 for a tusk but it is enough to keep them in food for a while.

The problem is, of course, that there has to be political will to stop a repeat of this disaster. The police and authorities have to investigate seriously to find out which companies supplied this cyanide to the villagers. They also have to look at how, and who, gets the elephant tusks out of the country. Is this an organised mafia-style syndicate? And who will they come up against in their investigations? I doubt that we will ever know, but let us hope that the owners of that cyanide are at least given a rap on their knuckles and don't do it again. I think that is all we can hope for.

Elephant Problem

Elephants will move. They don't know about lines on a map which tell you and me that this is a wildlife area but that this bit is assigned to human habitation. They just walk where their will takes them and where they think they are safe.

In Dombodema, south of Great Zimbabwe, elephants have been causing problems. The children are afraid to go to school and some women have complained that they are scared to the point of having premature births. The people are asking ZimParks to do something about it.

This area, as far as I can make out, was part of the CAMPFIRE program. CAMPFIRE - Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources. The Campfire Program started in Mahenya by Clive Stockil, who we mentioned in a previous Weekly – he has just been awarded the Prince William Award for Conservation in Africa. Clive started to make sure that the communities around Gonarezhou National Park benefitted from tourism and that they got schools and clinics. Also they earned money while living next to wildlife from tourist enterprises. The CAMPFIRE program quickly spread throughout Zimbabwe. But, over the years with the land redistribution, the benefits from CAMPFIRE have dried up. The new owners, even if they continue to hunt or use their land for tourism, no longer give back to their communities.

In Zambia we had the ADMARE program which I can't find much about on the internet. Has it died? In Namibia they have the Community Based Natural Resource Management Programme (CBNRM) which is doing extremely well. Botswana has a similar program. For Africa to save its wildlife all these programs are essential. They provide services which are nearby villages so that the people do not have to walk for miles to reach them. The people, too, earn money and will tolerate living next to wildlife.



Botswana and IUCN call for global action to stop African elephant poaching

IUCN 10 October 2013

As the surge in African elephant poaching and illegal ivory trade continues, the Government of Botswana and IUCN are convening a high-level summit on the African Elephant calling for stronger global action to halt the illegal trade and secure viable elephant populations across Africa.

Hosted by the President of the Republic of Botswana H.E. Lieutenant General Seretse Khama Ian Khama, the event will bring together Heads of State and representatives of all African elephant range countries, as well as high-level representatives from key transit and destination countries in the illegal African elephant ivory trade chain.

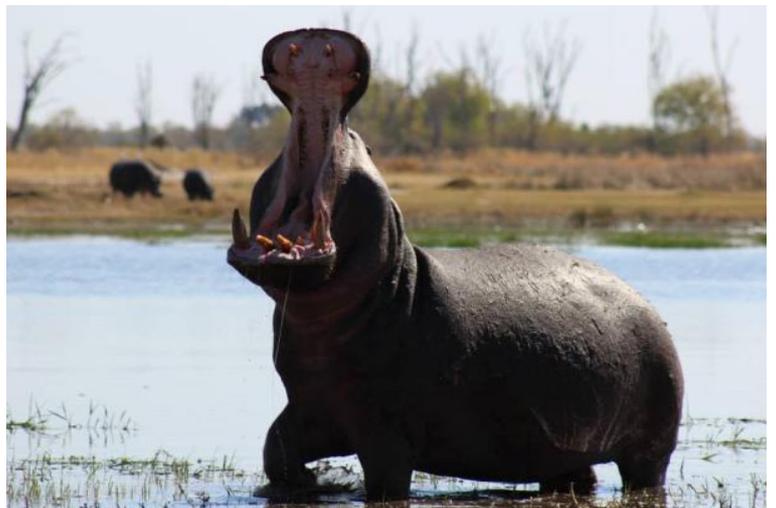
“The need for all African nations to work together to manage our continent’s natural resources is more important than ever,” says Minister of Environment, Wildlife and Tourism, Botswana Mr T S Khama. “Africa needs the world’s support to address the issues of wildlife trafficking and trade, as it is the world that is creating the demand for wildlife products which drives poaching on our continent, and so threatens the survival of species.” ...

The African Elephant Summit will take place from 2 to 4 December 2013 in Botswana’s capital Gaborone.

Desert & Delta

An amazing afternoon started when we were watching a breeding herd of Elephants drinking water. After they all finished drinking the breeding herd started moving on.

When we all thought that it was the end of the show, a big male elephant showed up. He went straight to the little mud pool instead of a big waterhole. This time he only went there for a mud bath. He started by taking mud with his trunk and spraying all over his body and then performing by trying to push its rear into a tiny little hole. With all the posing he gave us, he became the most photographed animal of the day.



On the other side a young male hippo was trying his luck of challenging the dominant male. Luckily the big male managed to claim his territory back by winning the title, and you can see why!

Story by Mod - Guide at Camp Moremi — Moremi Mud Bath....)

WOLFGANG’S COLUMN

UGANDA WILDLIFE AUTHORITY LAUNCHES INTELLIGENCE UNIT

80 rangers were selected by UWA to take part in an intelligence course conducted for them by leading intelligence experts from the Uganda People’s Defense Force, to form the core of a new unit tasked with gathering information on poaching, illegal trade, smuggling of wildlife, birds and reptiles and the illicit game meat trade, among other functions. The 80 were passed out earlier this week at the army’s school of military intelligence and security in Fort Portal, Western Uganda, where UWA’s executive director Dr. Andrew Seguya said: *‘The biggest challenge we have been having is collecting information. You may have a strong force but without information, you can’t achieve a lot. You can never have enough boots on the ground because we [have to] control about 10 per cent of the country’s total surface [being protected areas like national parks and*

game reserves]. *This step [The formation of an UWA Intelligence Unit] will go a long way in combating illegal activities in our parks'.*

Seguya then went on to speak on the deployment of the newly trained officers and added: *'We will first take care of the most vulnerable spots. These are parks near the borders. We want to break the back of the poaching rings – because it is a well-coordinated business with funders from South East Asia'* leaving no doubt where in his mind, and in the opinion of the entire conservation fraternity in Uganda, the core of the problem of poaching is rooted.

The newly passed out intelligence officers, 15 of whom are female it was pointed out to this correspondent, learned techniques to analyze intelligence information aimed at ensuring the security of wildlife and tourists. The course unit included training in operational intelligence, counter terrorism, political education and criminal investigation, among others. More courses for selected UWA rangers have already been agreed in order to strengthen the new team and allow for effectively covering all the protected areas across the country. Well done UWA and congratulations to the 80 graduates.

TANZANIA WAIVES VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR SOUTH AFRICANS

Tanzania's tourism sector has welcomed the government's move to abolish Visa requirements for South African citizens, as stakeholders see new opportunities arise to market safaris and beach holidays in the South African market place. Already is Mango, one of South Africa's low cost carriers, flying twice a week now between Johannesburg and Zanzibar, after 'upgrading' the flight from charter to a scheduled service. According to previous information a third flight in fact is planned for the upcoming high season to cater for the anticipated strong demand, which will only be accelerated by no longer requiring a Visa from South Africans.

Still pending though is the start of flights by FastJet from Dar es Salaam to Johannesburg, after South African civil aviation bureaucrats threw a spanner in the works on the eve of the inaugural flights, demanding for yet more documents in an apparent move to give home boys South African Airways a few more clear weeks to milk the market with ridiculously high fares.

'We have been to Indaba many times and there is strong demand for holidays in Tanzania, especially Zanzibar. When it gets cold in South Africa during their winter the people want to get away and we in Tanzania can offer competitive packages. Our quality of Zanzibar resorts are equal in many ways to some of the Indian Ocean island South Africans are used to travel to. Our safari lodges and camps are rated highly too. Removing Visa requirements was the right move to open the doors wide for a lot more South African people to come to Tanzania and enjoy our beaches and parks' commented a regular source before adding *'When FastJet finally can take off with their flights to South Africa, they have very very affordable airfares on the market to come to Dar es Salaam and from there can easily take the ferries to Zanzibar, or fly with FastJet to Kilimanjaro and start a safari from there. My colleagues and I are very excited about these prospects'.*

Tanzania, besides being a member of the East African Community is also a member of SADC and as such has been keen in recent months to accelerate economic and political cooperation with SADC's lead nation South Africa. Watch this space.

IN YOUR FACE STATE HOUSE DAR ES SALAAM TELLS CONSERVATION CRITICS

Critics of a recent conservation award given in the US to President Kikwete, which some described as making the goat the gardener in reference to his time in State House presiding over an unprecedented slaughter of elephants in Tanzania going into the tens of thousands, have been told to shut up by the Director of Communications at State House Dar es Salaam Mr. Salva Rweyemamu, who was clearly stung by the intensity of the criticism so soon and so harshly no sooner than his boss had been given an award termed by conservationists *'worth nothing, nothing at all'*.

Rweyemamu in fact exposed the government's true intent, willingly or just by shooting his mouth off as has been suggested, that the highway across the migration routes of the Serengeti will be built by hook or crook, Uranium in the Selous would be mined by hook or crook and the soda ash extraction plant at Lake Natron too would be built, even though it would destroy the only breeding place for the entire East African flamingo population.

Conservation sources immediately rubbished his assertion though that President Kikwete had vowed to use the army against poaching, with one source writing: *'Kikwete promised that last year too and the only thing which happened is that senior army officers were since then implicated in poaching themselves. The rot in his government goes just too deep and too many of his own establishment are up to their hair tips involved in poaching and ivory smuggling. Such retorts are no longer holding water and he and his government are standing exposed as the worst environmental offenders in Tanzania's entire history. In fact, Mwalimu must be turning in his grave considering his strong commitment to conservation, which has now all but gone down the drain for shortlived profits and alleged bribes'*.

Other conservation sources pointed to CITES and other international bodies reports which have suggested that the majority of the blood ivory comes from Tanzania and mainly from the Selous and Ruaha where hardly any protection exists in the deep of those reserves and parks, allowing for commercial scale slaughter which opposition figures in parliament have pegged at well over the 30 elephant a day poached given in an official report by government.

OTHER STUFF

Google Earth Saves Kenya's Maasai Mara Elephants With Drones

By Chris Spillane, Bloomberg

Standing in his flatbed truck, Marc Goss touches "take off" on his iPad 3 and a \$300 AR Drone whirs into the air as his latest weapon to fight elephant poachers around Kenya's Maasai Mara National Reserve.

Kenya is proposing stiffer penalties for the slaughter of elephants and rhinos with fines of as much as 10 million Kenyan shillings (\$1.2 million) and 15-year jail terms.

"It's an arms race," said Goss, whose green khaki clothing shields him from thorny acacia branches in the 30,000 hectares (74,132 acres) of savanna he protects. "We're seeing larger numbers of poachers."

Besides the almost 2 foot-long drone, Goss and other conservationists are using night-vision goggles and Google Earth to halt the decline of Kenya's wildlife, which helps attract \$1 billion a year in tourism. With elephant ivory sold for as much as \$1,000 a kilogram in Hong Kong, Kenya is facing its most serious threat from poaching in almost a quarter of a century, according to the United Nations.

At least 232 elephants have been killed in the year to Sept. 30, adding to 384 last year from a population of 40,000. Demand for illicit ivory from expanding economies such as China and Thailand has doubled since 2007, according to the UN Environment Programme. ...

When he started using the drones, Goss thought they would help mainly with providing aerial footage of the landscape and tracking poachers armed with rifles and the Maasai who sometimes killed the animals when they interfere with the grazing of their cows. He soon discovered they could help by frightening the elephants, keeping them out of harm's way.

Bee Swarm

"We realized very quickly that the elephants hated the sound of them," said Goss, whose week-old beard goes white near his temples. "I'm assuming that they think it's a swarm of bees."

Goss and his team have put collars with global positioning system devices on 15 elephants so they can be tracked on a computer overlaying their paths on Google Earth. That way the animals, who have names such as Madde, after Goss's wife, Fred, Hugo and Polaris, can be followed to see if they've strayed into areas at risk of poaching or human conflict.

Goss hopes to buy 10 more drones and to modify them by adding a mechanism that releases capsaicin, the active component in chili pepper, when elephants stray near dangerous areas. Paint balls loaded with chili pepper are being used in Zambia's lower Zambezi region to deter elephants from high-risk zones.

“Drones are basically the future of conservation; a drone can do what 50 rangers can do,” said James Hardy, a fourth-generation Kenyan and manager of the Mara North Conservancy. “It’s going to reach a point where drones are on the forefront of poaching. At night time we could use it to pick up heat signatures of poachers, maybe a dead elephant if we’re quick enough.” ...

14 Chinese workers arrested in Gabon over elephant trunk breakfast

Kevin Heath, Wildlife News

14 Chinese forestry workers about to eat a roasted elephant trunk breakfast have been arrested by Gabonese wildlife rangers. Wildlife rangers in Gabon raided a Chinese sawmill on Wednesday to the south-west of the Minkebe National Park and arrested 14 workers for wildlife offenses. The raid was conducted following a tip-off from security guards and the Chinese were arrested as they ate breakfast – roasted elephant trunk.

The security guard alerted authorities after he saw elephant skins being hung out to dry at the sawmill. The raid also unearthed a range of wildlife products including unworked ivory, carved ivory chop-sticks and pangolin scales.

The raid took place at a forestry camp near Makokou in northeast Gabon which is just to the south-west of the Minkebe National Park. A report earlier this year highlighted that the vast rainforest national park had lost 11,000 of its forest elephants since 2004.

Despite regular protestations from the Chinese government that their overseas workers do not take part in wildlife crime, it is becoming a common problem now that as Chinese companies become more established in the development of Africa so the wildlife suffers as the workers help themselves to the local wildlife.

Vietnam customs seize 2 tons of ivory tusks

Independent Online

Hanoi - Customs officials in Vietnam's northern province of Hai Phong seized ivory tusks weighing more than 2 tons concealed inside a container imported from Malaysia, authorities said on Wednesday.

“We discovered suspicious signs about the container,” said Nguyen Kien Giang, director of division number 3 of Hai Phong Customs. “We decided to scan and open it and discovered the elephant tusks hidden inside packages of sea shells.”

Each of the tusks, which were found on Friday, were cut into three or four pieces, he said. The container was bound for China. ...

Kenya: 1,600 ivory pieces hidden in sesame seeds

Yahoo News

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Kenyan officials are counting and weighing more than 1,600 pieces of illegal ivory found hidden inside bags of sesame seeds in freight traveling from Uganda to Kenya's major port city, Mombasa.

Kenya Wildlife Service official Arthur Tuda said Tuesday that smugglers hid small pieces of ivory inside hundreds of 90-kilogram (200-pound) bags of seeds. Tuda said officials have found 1,642 ivory pieces weighing nearly 5 tons in two shipping containers bound for Turkey. ...

Hillary and Chelsea Clinton unveil \$80m effort to fight illegal ivory trade

Suzanne Goldenberg, The Guardian

Hillary and Chelsea Clinton on Thursday deployed their mother-daughter star power to help the effort to save African elephants, brokering an \$80m effort to stop the ivory poaching which threatens the animals with extinction.

The crackdown on 50 poaching hot spots in Africa involves several conservation groups and African governments. But conservation leaders, unveiling the plan at the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) annual meeting, went out of their way to credit Hillary Clinton for giving prominence to the issue of the illegal trade in wildlife while she was secretary of state.

"She has been directly involved," said Cristián Samper, president of the Wildlife Conservation Society, at a press conference. "She personally reached out to a number of African leaders." ...

The funds now mobilised will be used to hire and train 3,100 park rangers at 50 sites in eastern and central Africa; to fund sniffer-dog teams along the top smuggling routes; and to train law-enforcement officials and judges responsible for prosecuting international trafficking gangs. The CGI is looking to raise an additional \$70m for the anti-poaching plan over the next three years. ...

HK Nabs \$1.5M in Ivory in 3rd Big Bust Since July (China/Cote d'Ivoire)

ABC News

Hong Kong customs agents have seized nearly a ton of illegal ivory worth about \$1.5 million, officials said Thursday, in the city's third big bust of endangered species products in three months. Customs officials said they found a total of 189 elephant tusks weighing 769 kilograms (1,695 pounds) at the southern Chinese city's busy port in anti-smuggling operations carried out in late September.

The ivory was wrapped in linen and nylon bags and hidden in large bags of soybeans in containers on three separate ships, said Vincent Wong, head of Ports and Maritime Command. The shipments came from Cote d'Ivoire and transited through Malaysia. Officials said the likely final destination was mainland China.

No arrests have been made and authorities are looking for the smugglers, Wong said. ...

Animals tracked with tiny tags summon their own drones

From New Scientist

IN A dark, rainy forest on New Zealand's Great Barrier Island, zoologist Robin Freeman waited. And waited. He spent two weeks in 2008 on a stakeout in anticipation of a black petrel. It was due back at its nest – and with it, the expensive GPS data logger it was wearing. All along, one thought nagged at Freeman: "There must be a better way of doing this."

And now there is. Using Freeman's subsequent work on GPS-tag miniaturisation, engineers at Microsoft Research in Cambridge, UK, last week introduced a new generation of tracking tags that can be interrogated from the air by drones. On sensing a weak signal from one postage-stamp-sized tag fixed to an animal, a drone can fly towards the creature on autopilot and retrieve the tag's data.

But that's not all. The tags contain networking hardware that allows them to contact each other and send their data from one tag to the next until the information reaches a tag within range of a base station, which could be attached to a fixed antenna or to a drone. "So obtaining data from a single member of a tracked wolf pack could result in all the data for the individuals it has been in contact with," says Freeman, who is now with the Zoological Society of London, which is working alongside University College London and Microsoft in a venture called Technology For Nature.

"Drones can fly around listening for the 'heartbeats' of the tags," says Lucas Joppa, the Microsoft team's leader. "Once the autopilot flies it to the animal, the drone can turn on its high-definition cameras and start getting a more holistic sense of what's going on." ...

MARRIAGE BAN COMES UNDER FIRE

By Boniface Keakabetse, Ngami Times

North West District councillors have resolved to engage the Batawana royal family to rescind its decision to place a six-month moratorium on marriages in Ngamiland. The ban started on September 15 and is expected to run until the first week of March next year.

Speaking during the just-ended NWD Council session, specially-elected councillor Abel Molelo requested the House to demand that the bogosi annul the decision, which he described as the most despicable decision to be taken by the tribal leadership. He argued that only marriages done under customary law are within the powers of Bogosi while civil marriages are outside their mandate. Molelo told the councillors that it is highly likely that the decree is in direct violation of the rights of Ngamiland residents and other Batswana who may be forced to marry in other parts of Botswana at great expense.

Molelo successfully convinced councillors from both the ruling and opposition parties to call on the Royal House to rescind the decision. Councillors also said the ban would have far-reaching financial implications for small but vibrant wedding sector businesses, the majority of which are operated by women and youths. Most of these businesses that are funded through government empowerment programmes include production of wedding invitation cards, costumes, tent hire, music and photographic services, among others

The Bogosi took the decision to stop all marriages in Ngamiland for six months in order to allow people to effectively make use of the current ploughing season.

Have a good week

Gill